

# UPDATE

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY SERVICES

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## Smyth County "mobilizes" response

**W**hen Smyth County's Emergency Services Coordinator, Charles Harrington, and Director of Emergency Services, Bill Blevins, took on the challenge of building a mobile command post, they began by recruiting the support of their Board of Supervisors and local law enforcement. Three years later, the Smyth County Mobile Command Post is ready for the road.

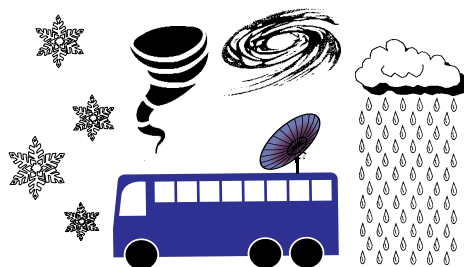
"When our local school board put four buses up for sale, we were able to buy one for about \$1200," said Harrington. "We felt we needed a mobile command post for any type of emergency that may arise within the county."

His case before the Board of Supervisors was simple. The county had recently changed from a split communications system to a consolidated 9-1-1 system. He pointed out to the board that the primary function of the mobile command post would be to serve as backup communications in the event the 9-1-1 system went down.

"We also explained to them that the mobile command post will be used, not only by emergency services, but by fire, EMS, search and rescue and law enforcement as well," said Harrington. They convinced the board, which allocated a total budget of \$60,000 for outfitting

the vehicle.

"Initially, they were a little hesitant to put out that much money up front," Harrington observed as he described



negotiations with the board. "They placed it in an escrow account and released \$20,000 a year. That way, they felt they had more control over how the money was spent."

Harrington and his Deputy Coordinator, Jerry Breen, got technical assistance from their local communications technicians and consulted with two firms to determine the kind of equipment they needed and how it should be configured.

The communications hardware not only contains every radio frequency in the county but the console that was installed is identical to the one used by the communications center at the courthouse. "By designing it this way, the dispatchers will not have to be retrained to use this console," said Harrington.

Over the months, they installed a generator, air conditioning, a new floor, map cases and map boards, dark tinting for the windows, florescent lighting and a table to be used for planning sessions. For a reasonable price, Harrington hired a retired member of the community to install cabinets, countertops and drawers.

To save money, they used surplus equipment whenever possible. For example, the sirens and emergency lights were taken from law enforcement vehicles which had received updated equipment.

In addition to communications, the vehicle serves another useful function. "The storage cabinets will contain blankets, pillows, first aid supplies, applicable paperwork and all the necessary equipment, except for food products, to set up an emergency shelter that can support 50 people," said Harrington. "If necessary, a crew can drive to a designated location and have an emergency shelter up and running within a couple of hours."

He observed, "There's a tremendous amount of resources to be found in the community. You just need to look to see what's there. We used surplus equipment wherever possible and did not contract out any work except for the installation of communications equipment. Our vehicle is not fancy, but it's functional."

## Beef up your emergency management credentials

**T**his past summer, the University of Richmond introduced a new degree program in emergency services management designed to give those in the field the knowledge they need to be effective managers. Students have the flexibility to either complete a 30 semester hour core

curriculum and earn a certificate or continue on and apply program credits toward an Associate's or bachelor's degree in Applied Studies with a major in emergency services management.

"This is a growing field and people entering it need an overview of the

emergency services profession. This program provides that and more," said student and VDES assistant operations officer, Anthony McLean.

He continued, "For those who have been in the field, the program can only (Continued on page 2)

# Hurricane Fran tests donations management

**W**hen donations come flooding in after a disaster, too often that process becomes a whole new disaster. One of the lessons state emergency managers around the country gleaned from Hurricanes Hugo and Andrew was the need to manage state-level donations.

Shortly after Andrew, Virginia established a State Donations Management Program that incorporated lessons learned from both Andrew and Hugo. The program serves two primary functions: to coordinate and distribute donated money, goods and services coming to the state. It functions under emergency services and is funded from the VDES budget.

"When Hurricane Hugo hit, I was working at St. Croix as a

volunteer with the Red Cross," said program manager, Bill Curry. "The Air Force was flying in planeloads of donated goods. We were getting things like fur coats and all kinds of items we couldn't really use. Another big problem we faced was that we had no place to put the stuff because just about every building was destroyed."

To avoid these types of problems, Virginia's donations management program was set up to control the flow of solicited and unsolicited goods donated to the state.

During Hurricane Fran, the program handled some unusual offers of assistance. For example, the town of Evansville, Illinois, asked to donate between \$500-1,000 to Danville. Sailors from the U.S.S. George Washington and

the Norfolk Naval Air Station offered to help with debris removal and cleanup.

Groups and individuals donated bedding, prescription drugs, child care and other goods as well as offering services such as building and bridge repair. One source offered bulk amounts of top soil to replace what had been washed away by floodwaters.

In addition, Fran served as a test for coordination of donated goods between states. To track needs among states affected by the hurricane, FEMA's donations management team, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Puerto Rico held regular teleconferences. At one point, a convenience store owner in Emporia, Virginia, offered to donate baby food, formula,

powdered milk and nonperishable food and transport the items as well. "We determined North Carolina could use these supplies, so we put the man in touch with that state's donations management and he sent the goods down there," said Curry.

To ensure accountability of cash donations to the state, the Commonwealth Disaster Relief Fund was established. "Virginia is one of three states that has such a fund," said Curry. "We modeled it on a similar system used by Iowa after the Midwestern floods. If people want to donate cash, they now have the option to choose from a number of different organizations, including the state fund."

For more information, call Bill Curry at 804/692-1963.

## ..... Credentials

(continued from page 1)

enhance their development as an emergency manager. It's important to keep up with current changes and the curriculum addresses those changes."

Classes cover topics such as law and ethics for the emergency manager, public budgeting and finance, emergency planning, research skills, current issues in emergency management, computers in emergency services and public relations.

In addition, "The program offers students the opportunity to establish valuable networks with former alumni and with other students," said Dr. James L. Narduzzi, Dean of the School of Continuing Studies.

For more information, call the University of Richmond's School of Continuing Studies at 804/289-8133.

## College sharpens SAR skills

This college is not your run-of-the-mill academic institution. The courses are hands-on and students learn managerial skills, strategic planning, how to be good detectives and how to talk to dogs. In fact, dogs are welcome at this school.

The Ground Search and Rescue Institute (GSAR) is conducted at least twice a year for SAR practitioners around the state. Designed to be a two-part program, GSAR runs three to four courses simultaneously, many of which combine classroom and field work.

"The VDES SAR resources are composed of many multifaceted groups that need different kinds of training," said State SAR Coordinator, Winnie Pennington. "GSAR helps fulfill this need with diverse class offerings. Because of the length of the courses, students can take only one per session, but because more than one course is offered at a time, they can choose the one that best suits their purpose."

The most recently concluded session, held this past fall, offered the Basic Field Team Member, Field Team Leader and Practical Search Operations courses. A sign cutter awareness course for advanced field team members was added to the curriculum as well.

"The agency's SAR program is unique in that the SAR community and VDES develop the training together," said Pennington. "This partnership benefits both parties. Training can be tailored to the needs within our state and, during an event, VDES is able to offer local jurisdictions SAR resources that are trained to statewide standards. In turn, the SAR organizations can exercise their skills more frequently in real-life situations, as well as qualify for limited benefits if called upon as a state resource."

At this point, another session is being planned for fall of this year. For more information, call Winnie Pennington at 804/674-2422.

# HAZ MAT



## Roanoke County gains new deputy fire chief

**S**outhwest Virginia has just acquired a major resource. After two and a half years with the VDES Technological Hazards Division, Willie Howlett relinquished his position as Hazardous Materials Field Manager to assume new responsibilities as Roanoke County's Deputy Chief for Fire and Rescue.

With over 30 years experience in Fire Services with Chesterfield County, Howlett has witnessed a major evolution in emergency services. "I started as a volunteer with the Chesterfield County Fire Department in 1965," said Howlett. "Since that time, probably the biggest change I've seen is the growing emphasis on providing for the safety of the first responder through increased training. The end result is that first responders are more prepared than ever to protect public safety."

Howlett pointed out that technology has radically altered the first responder's job. They now have an array of sophisticated equipment at their fingertips ranging from different types of fire and breathing apparatus to various kinds of personal protective equipment.

In addition, Howlett observed that response has become more complex as environmental crimes have increased, the threat of terrorism has escalated and the spectrum of potential

hazardous and radiological incidents has grown.

Because emergency services is such a rapidly changing field, Howlett emphasized the importance of becoming actively involved in organizations at the national level. He felt this was one of the best ways to stay in the forefront of trends and developments in the field.

"I think the biggest contribution Willie made to the division was his emphasis on professional development," said acting Hazardous Materials Field Manager Greg Britt. "Emergency services workers do much more than just respond to calls. Willie provided a range of training that better prepared us to handle all types of situations."

"People are the most valuable resource we have," said Howlett. "Now, more than ever, we need to be better trained and better educated — from first responder to top management. We need comprehensive and integrated programs through which we can train our first line of support to systematically manage and control their human resources, as well as their physical resources. The VDES Hazardous Materials Response Program exemplifies these concepts. I was privileged to be involved in one of the best programs of its kind in the nation."

## Cost of disasters major concern at federal level

**T**he word is out on the streets that disaster costs must be controlled at the federal level. This could mean that presidential disaster declarations may become more difficult to obtain. FEMA agency director James Lee Witt noted that federal disaster expenditures have risen from \$3.3 billion to more than \$13 billion over the past five years.

Looking back on 1996:

Presidentially declared disasters included 75 major disasters and eight emergencies in 37 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

The single most costly disaster was Hurricane Fran, totaling about \$415 million in FEMA relief assistance. About \$359 million of that amount went to North Carolina.

Regarding multiple presidential declarations among the 50 states, Pennsylvania received six, West Virginia five, New York and North Carolina four each, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Oregon and Virginia three each, and Alabama, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Ohio, Vermont and Washington two each.

Flooding was the most common disaster, figuring in 44 of the presidential declarations. Severe winter storms accounted for 17, hurricanes and tropical storms were involved in nine and tornadoes in seven.

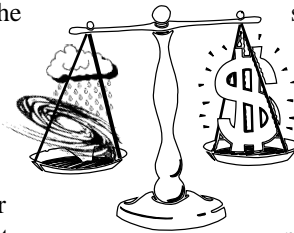
"Our major efforts in the coming year will concentrate on providing financial incen-

tives and instituting other measures to mitigate against disaster losses and ease the burden on the American taxpayer," Witt said. "FEMA will embark on an ambitious campaign to prevent people and communities from becoming the victims of disasters. We are ready to

work with city, county and state officials to establish 'disaster-resistant' communities and promote safer, more economically sound neighborhoods throughout the nation."

To bring his message to the people, Witt will be introducing the concept of disaster-resistant communities in a series of town-hall meetings in high-risk areas across the country. The ultimate purpose is to encourage emergency managers and the public to focus on mitigation and recovery as well as response.

Another potential development for 1997 is that FEMA will most likely reexamine the federal-state cost-share formulas as well as the entire public assistance program. The agency has already proposed changing the rules for restoration of damaged facilities with regard to public assistance. The proposals would limit reconstruction costs paid for by federal government to the building code standards that were in place at the time of the disaster. For information regarding public assistance, call the FEMA Response and Recovery Directorate at 202/646-3692.



## TRAINING



### Coordinators' Briefing

March 4-5  
Virginia Beach

### Basic PIO/Media Relations

March 13  
Danville

### Emergency Planning Course

April 1-2  
Chester

### Managing Mass Fatalities Incidents

April 8-10  
Roanoke

### Introduction to Emergency Management

April 23-25  
Williamsburg  
For information, call the VDES Training Office at 804/674-2458

### Technological Hazards Division

#### Advanced Hazardous Materials Control

April 14-18  
Ashland  
For information, call the VDES Tech Haz Division at 804/674-2510

### Training, continued.

#### Cameo Training Workshop

April 16-17  
Ft. Eustis

#### Hospital Emergency Room Decontamination Class

April 7  
Richlands  
For information, call George Roarty at 804/674-2708

#### Search and Rescue

##### SAR Council

April 26  
Richmond

#### National Association for Search and Rescue Conference "Response '97"

May 28-31  
Richmond  
For information, call Winnie Pennington at 804/674-2422

#### The Public Policy in Emergency Management class scheduled for May 7 in Fredericksburg has been canceled.

#### SALEMDUG 12th Annual Conference: Emergency Management and Technology

April 7-9  
Nashville, Tennessee  
Call 615/741-2924 for information

## New VDES course premieres in April

If you have ever secretly wanted to be a meteorologist, VDES is offering a new course that might help satisfy your craving. Titled "Hazardous Weather and Flooding Preparedness," it was designed by FEMA and the National Weather Service (NWS) in response to requests from local emergency managers around the country.

"The goal of the course is to teach emergency managers to effectively interpret the weather data they receive so they can better protect their communities from flooding and other weather-related hazards," said Sam Hoffman, VDES exercise training officer. "We will assess the student response to this first offering and determine if or how often other sessions will be scheduled."

The course offers advanced training on weather and flooding situations as well as warning coordination and communication. Strategies to improve coordination among state response organizations and local communities during a hazardous weather event will be discussed. If you have ever been confused about what kind of information is available from the NWS and how you can get it, the course will cover that topic and many others relevant to the emergency manager.

Wakefield meteorologist Bill Sammler is instructing the weather-related portions of the class. Judy Riutort, Deputy Emergency Services Coordinator for York County, will address the role of the emergency manager during these types of events. She will examine case studies and lead discussions on the emergency manager's roles and responsibilities.

**The course will be held April 16-18 in Chesterfield. For more information, call the VDES Training Office at 804/674-2458.**



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UPDATE is a monthly publication of the Virginia Department of Emergency Services. Contributions of articles or ideas are welcome and can be made by calling 804/674-2499. State Coordinator...Addison E. Slayton  
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